

Sermon Sept. 1, 2019

Today's Gospel has been quite perplexing to me. At my first reading. It seems simple enough. And then doing my research everyone seemed to have similar themes. I am not sure that this is theologically accurate but one person states that in Luke's Gospel Jesus is either going to a banquet at a banquet or leaving a banquet. They talked about the importance of social standing historically and the importance of being invited and where you sat next to the host and to the quality of the food that you were served was determined by where you sat.

So, Jesus first speaks to the guest in a parable. Basically, saying be humble where you sit when you are invited. Better to save face and not be disgraced by being asked to move down. Then to the host. Invite people the next time who are not able to repay you. All seems to be easy to preach about. Humility will be reward...not humble you will need some work. And help the less fortunate.

I had a mother growing up that was very much about not acting above your perceived social standing in being who you were. To know your place and accept your gifts as well as others gifts. You might be a better student, but they may be able to repair your car when you can't so honor who they are and who you are. So, if you needed to sit further from the host so be it. In her eyes it would be better to be asked to move up then requested to go to a lower place at the table. And if you were one of the less fortunate, she would never make you feel like you were.

But that just seems to easy to say. I kept feeling that there is more here that Jesus wants us to know and to do.

We, or at least I think most of us, remember family gathering where the youngest at the meal sit at the card table with the folding chairs. It truly was the more fun place to sit. Though if your Mom or Dad caught you being out of line or not being proper you would get that look that was more powerful than

words, just you wait until we get home...or if severe enough a verbal reprimand for your egregious action and then really just wait until we get home.

But life at the kids table was easier, more lighthearted. The conversation more fun. Not that the food or the service at the table was any less than the adult table. But we just didn't take ourselves that serious.

But there would come that fateful day that rite of passage when you were invited to move up to the dining room and the adult table. Typically, after the older cousins had gotten married, or had gone to college or had left the area to start their career. And you couldn't wait to for that day to happen. To make your parents proud that you could hold your own in your adult, or so you thought adult opinions. That you were up on the current events of the day. I believe I was some where in high school when that finally happened for me.

But it wouldn't take long before you yearned for the simpler days of the kids table. It was a humble place to be at and way more fun. And I have a confession to make. I wish I had never had to leave the kids table at my family's gatherings.

I have another major problem from today's reading, and I am not sure of the name for the proper diagnosis. I have an extreme case of don't notice me - need extreme attentionitis. It's a difficult but maybe not so rare of a condition of I want to be humble and not in the limelight. But please ask me to sit at the head table to recognize me for all the things I am good at or have done. You know what I mean. (Do the stop but please gesture). Don't leave me at the kids table I want to be at the adult table. For me it is that unique feeling of why do I need any special attention for doing what I know and or at least believe to be the correct thing? And that feeling of wanting recognition for a job well done. It is why I come into New Song on days I preach and say this will suck and then wanting the

feedback at the peace that it was OK. I am struggling with finding the balance in all of that.

Family dinners at my home are in that cycle where we don't need a kids table at the moment. I have friends over for dinner which are informal events and the table is such that there is no social pecking order and if we play Cards against Humanity there is no social pecking order at all. If you don't know that game talk to me after church.

Big banquets and head tables are still reserved for weddings, fund raiser and state dinners. Which typically the food is awful all the way around and I have yet to be invited to a state dinner.

But as I keep struggling with this simple Gospel today, I keep hearing the gnawing words in the back of my head. Jerry today is really no different than in Jesus time it actually maybe worse.

I keep hearing from today's Gospel that the word humility or to be humble is under attack.

We still have the proper order of positions of power and where people believe they should be seated at the table. But I sense into today's world that being humble is perceived to be a great weakness. Aggravated by social media and the actual people around the world who have no sense of shame in their total lack of humility. In a world where celebrity is prized over everything. Where the need for fame is overwhelming. And some to go so far as to claim they are the Chosen One. And hence my own struggles. What has happened to just doing a good job and at being a decent person? Of not feeling in adequate if you just fall somewhere in the middle of the bell curve of life. How do we find the balance in all of this? I know for a fact I am not the chosen one but darn I thought that post should have gotten more likes.

In my world if I see one more salesperson brag about a sale I am going to scream. First that is your job to get something sold. Second, I know for a fact on that sale you just got lucky. And third what about the others things you have that haven't sold. But my humility may stops me and the fact that I need to be careful in how I represent my own image in the world I work and live in.

But as I struggle with today's Gospel there is one message that seems clear. If you need to strengthen your gift of humility it is to spend time with the least fortunate and the ones who can never repay you. And not just for a photo opportunity to post on look how good I am and what I have done to look like I have a social consciousness but really to spend time with them.

I have a long-time friend that recently retired from working in the lock up section of the psychic ward at UIHC. She came from a very well to do and socially prominent family. She is a wonderful personality with a mouth like a sailor. But she would

say if you want to remember how good you have it spend time with the patients here. I believe her great gift was to recognize the humanity in her patients with severe mental disorders and the often very thin line of humanity between those of perceived social status. She would say I treat them like my family. If they acted out, I would tell them knock that off. But most likely I tried to make them feel special. Most of them have had absolutely nothing in their lives. And when regulars returned from the few remaining mental health institutions, they always knew they had a friend in her. One of her favorites always wanted to have a black comb for his shirt pocket and when she saw he was there she would always bring him a new one. He would beam with his new comb. He could never repay her, but she didn't care. She may be a personality, but she understood that money, social status, really doesn't mean anything if you are not able to be there for others. And she would be the first to admit that they will never be able to buy you a new comb or take you to dinner. But the payback was in

the gift of their ability to show you gratitude. Something more than her social status family sometimes could do.

New Song over the years has helped in my angst and struggles with sermons and Gospels as a place that just lets me sit and ponder and to figure out what God is trying to tell me. It most likely won't find a cure for my don't notice me - need extreme attentionitis but it does offer a therapeutic place to just feel connection in the humility of the life of Christ. A Christ whom I can never repay apart from my gratitude for His times in my life and the gifts he has given me. Like all churches we will have times of struggles with our humility but if we can continue to help those who will never be able to repay, I think we can figure our way through those times.

And when we say in our service that all our welcome at this table, I hope that it comes from the place of the innocence and the fun and joy of the kids table where things are less serious. But that our actions in the world come from the adult table

where you don't need to have any social standing other than wanting a closer relationship with God. So that we can go out in the world to help those who will never be able to repay us and that we never feel the need to be repaid. That we will be a church that is happy being somewhere in the middle of the bell curve and that the work we do will not be for our glory but with gratitude and the glory of God.

And all of God's Children with extreme attentionitis say, Amen.